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ABSTRACT

With the notion of cultural framing as a theoretical backdrop, a study examined the role of culture in the work of foreign correspondents. The aim was to explore cultural aspects of international news reporting that may suggest avenues for more systematic inquiry into the role of culture in the work of the foreign correspondent. Of 75 examined that were by and about foreign correspondents, fewer than half (44%) referred explicitly to culture. Most references were cursory. In-depth interviews with six correspondents disclosed an unconscious awareness of the role of culture in their work, though all were articulate about culture once the topic was introduced. Interviews yielded information which, from a cultural framing standpoint, was grouped into four headings: cultural background, cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, and cultural constraints. Educationally, more attention should be given to the role of culture in reporting, not only to the origin of intercultural perceptions but also to appropriate journalistic methodologies. Journalists striving for a clear understanding of events in another culture should utilize methods that are sensitive to local conditions and, to some extent, that attempt to portray other cultures on their own terms rather than merely through the cultural filters of the journalist. (Thirty-six references and two appendixes--listing the books examined and providing information regarding the foreign correspondents interviewed--are attached.) (Author/SR)

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CULTURAL FRAMING:

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS AND THEIR WORK

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A paper presented to the International Communication Division of the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada, August 5-8, 1992.

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With the notion of cultural framing as a theoretical backdrop, this study examined the role of culture in the work of foreign correspondents by reviewing literature by and about correspondents and by interviewing correspondents. The aim was to explore cultural aspects of international news reporting that may suggest avenues for more systematic inquiry into the role of culture in the work of the foreign correspondent. Of the 75 books, fewer than half (44%) referred explicitly to culture. Most references were cursory. In-depth interviews with six correspondents disclosed an unconscious awareness of the role of culture in their work, though all were articulate about culture once the topic was introduced. Interviews yielded information which, from a cultural-framing standpoint, was grouped into four headings: cultural background, cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and cultural constraints. As the world continues to implode, we must try to understand better than we do now what happens in the cultural framing process and suggest ways that those who interpret other cultures for us may do so with greater care and concern. Educationally, more attention should be given to the role of culture in reporting, not only to the origin of intercultural perceptions but also to appropriate journalistic methodologies. Since information gathering methods can significantly influence the nature of results obtained, journalists striving for a clear understanding of events in another culture should utilize methods that are sensitive to local conditions and, to some extent at least, that attempt to portray other cultures on their own terms rather than merely through the cultural filters of the journalist.

An abstract of a paper presented to the International Communication Division of the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada, August 5-8, 1992.

(250-word abstract)

CULTURAL FRAMING: FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS AND THEIR WORK

Introduction

News portraying such events as the conflicts of the Croatians and Serbians, the Soviet coup and the travels of Haitian refugees have all been packaged for interpretation to different cultural audiences. The levels of analysis readers pick up from these reports can in turn influence their perceptions of the events and the regions. The foreign correspondent is just one player in the chain of intercultural communication, but certainly the foreign correspondent is a key player in the process of cultures communicating with and across other cultures. This can be an important factor in the sensitivity and understanding of people of other cultures.

How well do foreign correspondents understand the cultures they write about? Maybe not very well. Columnist William Pfaff writes, "Current press practice shifts correspondents from country to country so they won't 'go native' and will always see things through American eyes, a practice which institutionalizes ignorance and guarantees the perpetuation of stereotype. Americans look at the world through tourists' eyes because the professional observers have all but abdicated" (1989, 3).

Critchfield notes that the news of "ordinary people" goes unnoticed, and their lives only become newsworthy when something tragic happens (undated, 3). Once a crisis does occur, there is rarely any explanation of why people revolt, riot or starve. "What matters to both journalists and academics," continues Critchfield, "is that crises just tell the surface of a story and cities are not necessarily where history is being made" (1). He urges journalists to put these facts in a "civilized frame of reference" because many Americans end up with a fragmented view of the world (2).

Although the amount of reporting of international affairs appears to have decreased in recent years, the numbers of correspondents have increased, (Meisler 1990, 26; Garneau 1990, 18). A 1990 census reveals that the number of journalists working abroad has seen a marked increase to 1,734 correspondents, an increase of 150 percent since 1975 when there were 676 correspondents abroad, (Kliesch 1991, 26). As events in the world continue to exert a growing global impact, the role of the foreign correspondent becomes increasingly important and requires closer examination.

The Foreign Correspondent: Roles And Implications

The "foreign correspondent" as referred to in this study can generally be defined as media personnel who report and interpret the actions and events of different societies for a selected audience of readers not native to the country. This study views the foreign correspondent as a journalist in another country interested in the overall implications of an event, keeping history and background of the region in mind. This contrasts with the war correspondent, who is primarily interested in the "hard news" of military or crisis reporting for a limited period of time. As important gatekeepers in the flow and formation of international news, foreign correspondents present and shape our ideas of other cultures and societies. Their qualifications and how they go about their tasks ought to be of concern to all of us.

What qualifications do foreign correspondents have? How culturally prepared are they? What is their concept of culture? Are correspondents aware of "culture" as they prepare stories? How do they counteract cultural bias, preconceptions and stereotyping? Is there such a practice as "intercultural" reporting? If so, how does this differ from traditional journalism? In what ways, if any, are the reporting methods of foreign correspondents different from methods used

in their own country? How do they go about writing about another society? These are questions that have prompted this study.

Despite all that has been written by and about foreign correspondents, comparatively little research has dealt with the perceptions that foreign correspondents have of their work or their methods. The task of understanding an event rooted in the complexity of one culture and telling about it in the context of another culture is no simple matter. Additional explanatory information and background details must be included to convey the importance and implications of the event. Fisher points to the challenge of the foreign correspondent:

> It is precisely this selective news gathering and processing that is increasingly at issue. As journalists, reporters, and news managers perform one of the most important functions in an ever more global society, the term "gatekeeper," used so often in communications studies, is especially appropriate. The importance of *how* (italics added) they do their job can hardly be overestimated (1979, 60).

Purpose of Study

This study examines the role of culture in the work of the foreign correspondent. It does so by reviewing literature by and about foreign correspondents and by interviewing a number of foreign correspondents with particular attention being given to culture. The study is a preliminary report of a larger project concerning what the authors have come to call "intercultural journalism."

Though some research has dealt with foreign correspondents, little attention has been given to culture. A review of close to 75 books by and about foreign correspondents, including autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, biographies, surveys and other studies, show that cultural issues occasionally receive some attention but usually in only a parenthetical way. This study focuses directly on culture in

international reporting. The literature review helped to infuse the interviews.

Results of this research should shed some light on cultural aspects of international news reporting. In addition, results may suggest ways to improve the professionanl preparation of foreign correspondents and suggest avenues for more systematic inquiry into the role of culture in their work.

Culture and Cultural Framing

Culture, as the wellspring of organized human behavior, is one of those concepts that has become notoriously difficult to define. We use the concept broadly, following the evolution of the term by Williams (1981, 80), as a shared way of life. Thus, culture encompasses language, social act, history, art, religion, ritual, knowledge, experience, technology, etc. We distinguish "interculture" from "intracultural." The former connotes crossing national boundaries. The latter, in contrast, suggests cultural elements within given national boundaries. "Interculture" might be equated with "cross-culture" (Maletzke 1976, 410), though our preference is for the term "intercultural" because of the obvious emphasis on culture. The usage may be somewhat arbitrary but does not imply that "national" and "cultural" are the same (Anderson 1991, 4) or that national citizenship necessarily delineates "culture" or, for that matter, "ethnicity" (Hobsbawm 1990, 8). Our main point is that intercultural journalism is taken to mean news and information crossing over from one nation to another. This added dimension of culture to journalism brings with it a set of considerations which comprise the focus of this paper.

Cultural interchanges have a variety of purposes, not the least of which is political. The political aspect may, in fact, may be all pervasive, as pointed out by Appadurai in a penetrating analysis of

value and exchange in the social life of commodities (1986, 3). But another purpose of cultural interchanges--and the one prompting this inquiry--strives toward a better knowledge and understanding of societies, dispelling preconceptions and stereotypes. As Philip explains, such an exchange "helps to modify and narrow monocultural views to produce alternative and more flexible approaches and responses to human problems" (Bickley and Philip 1981, 8). Since such cultural barriers as ethnocentrism, stereotypes, language and preconceived frames of reference can hinder the process, intercultural communication must be carried out in a particularly sensitive way (Maletzke 1976, 413.)

News media bear a large responsibility in providing informed and accurate depictions of societies and events. As Braisted notes: "In a way international understanding is more important than ever simply because of the confusion and distortions resulting from fragmentary information, impressions, and unrelated information flooding the world as a result of tourism, radio, television and press services" (1975, 54). What is needed is a better understanding of how other societies and cultures function. The thesis of this paper is that foreign correspondents could do a better job of accurately and sensitively depicting other cultures if they themselves were more aware than they seem to be of the role of culture in their work.

Cultural framing will provide a theoretical framework in examining the work of foreign correspondents. The notion of framing appears to be a useful concept in helping to understand the journalistic process, from the identification of news values to the reporter's need to select and interpret information. The notion of framing has become widely used by media scholars, but is still somewhat nebulous (Tankard et al. 1991; Entman 1991). Our use of the concept is similar to what others

refer to as "news frames" or "media frames" except that our emphasis will be on culture and will focus on the correspondents themselves rather than an analyis of the content they produce.

In Gitlin's usage, framing involves "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (1980, 7). Thus, readers and viewers come to depend on news reports generally depicted, selected and organized through what journalists feel is important, which in turn is determined by their own frame of reference or, cultural framing.

Tuchman similarly draws on the notion of frame, suggesting that "news imparts to occurrences their *public character* (sic) as it transforms mere happenings into publicly discussable events" (1978, 3). She works on the assumption that stories are "the product of cultural resources and active negotiations" (5). Fairy tales and news stories are alike because they are meant to be passed on as public resources. "Both have a public character in that both are available to all, part and parcel of our cultural equipment. Both draw on the culture for their derivation . . . Both take social and cultural resources and transform them into public property" (5). For an item to be judged newsworthy by two individuals, it must be pertinent to both persons and must somehow be presented at some point to both individuals. The judgement on newsworthiness doubtless will be affected by making assumptions or taking information for granted about which the other person has neither experience nor knowledge (8).

The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate dealt with the need for journalistic cultural "reframing" when it called for a reassessment of news values. NWICO proponents sought a more accurate depiction of developing countries. "The act of selecting

certain news items for publication, while rejecting others, produces in the minds of the audience a picture of the world that may well be incomplete or distorted" (Many Voices 1980, 263). Such distortion may not be deliberate but rather unintentional.

Roeh and Dahlgren approach framing in a similar manner through their definition of reality construction as a "display of how identical visual accounts are edited and packaged to give different meanings within different national cultures" (1991, 49). The challenge, they argue, is for the journalist to "translate" the "foreign" into the "familiar" by placing events in cultural frameworks of understanding for the general public. They place the argument in a larger social realm:

> These frameworks have evolved out of the specific histories and collective experiences of each society and as most matrices for collective perception are taken for granted and are largely invisible to their users. Only in the analytic comparison with other frameworks do they begin to reveal themselves (1991, 49).

When it comes to international news, foreign correspondents are among the first important cultural framers of events. Depending on correspondents' experiences and the interpretations they make, resulting accounts inevitably end up with differing intentions, meanings and importance. Readers or viewers take these cultural frames and, in turn, impose their own cultural frames in the interpretive process.

It follows that it is important to determine the makeup of these cultural frames, how they came about in the first place and to what extent the foreign correspondent is aware of the process. The difference literally involves quality of information. As Underwood noted some time ago,

> If foreign news is to be made truly meaningful for the average reader, if it is to come alive for him, the

> journalist must be able to report it in such a way that the reader actually comes to grips with realities--the underlying foundation as well as the overt events--of the given situation. And this requires that he be able to translate these into terms that the readers can assimilate and, in a sense, make them their own (1970, 47).

Because each reader brings a knowledge likely different from that of the reporter, foreign correspondents must remember they are not merely communicators of news but interpreters of other cultures.

Method

Results of this study come from two sources: (1) an overview of books by and about foreign correspondents and (2) in-depth interviews with six foreign correspondents. Both phases of the study are ongoing.

The overview consisted of examining how the authors of 75 books by and about foreign correspondents dealt with, if at all, the notion of culture. Details of this analysis appear in the next section.

The interviews, conducted between 1988-91, were semi-structured with each lasting about one hour. Interview questions were suggested by the literature about foreign correspondents with a particular emphasis on culture. Further details about the interviews appear in the next section.

Results

An Overview of Works by and about Foreign Correspondents

To date, we have examined 75 books by and about foreign correspondents. The search has been limited to English language works but not confined to U.S. correspondents. Works include autobiographies, biographies and scholarly inquiries. We did not read every book, though minimally we read substantial portions of each and carefully examined tables of contents and, where available, indices. We looked for references to the notion of culture, defined broadly. Thus, we searched for discussion of such topics as language ability, familiarity with the history of a country and its people, professional

and academic preparation, length of time spent in a country--all with a particular eye for explicit references to cultural understanding, cultural differences, stereotyping, bias, etc. According to these criteria, less than half (44%) of the works dealt in some way with culture. Of these works, most referred to culture cursorily. The primary exceptions were those works whose aim was to examine critically the role of the foreign correspondent. This was not unexpected since the works had a variety of purposes, and failure to take into account culture in an explicit way does not necessarily indicate anything deficient. As noted, our intent was merely to ascertain the extent and nature of cultural awareness as reflected in the works. Appendix A lists the books examined to date.

In the next few pages we present a sampling of findings. The intent here is not to offer a full accounting. Instead, it is to show how these findings infused the subsequent interviews with foreign correspondents.

Hohenberg has written two excellent books that probe the work of foreign correspondents: Between Two Worlds: Policy, Press, and Public Opinion in Asian-American Relations (1967) and Foreign Correspondents: The Great Reporters and their Times (1964). Both deal extensively with aspects of culture. Between Two Worlds, based on a study for the Council on Foreign Relations, was begun from the assumption that "the shaping of foreign policy in an open society could be critically affected by the work of the foreign correspondent, his editor, and, indeed, the press and radio-TV media as a whole" (1967, ix). Focusing on Asia, the book includes data from 100 questionnaires and interviews with some 300 foreign ministers, editors and students. In one section, Hohenberg is critical of the credentials of the correspondent in Asia:

> While the unskilled, untrained, unreliable correspondent still exists in various parts of Asia, and sometimes achieves temporary prominence, editors of even moderate discernment now realize that such a reporter can cause more trouble than no correspondent at all (401).

Hohenberg goes on to outline obstacles faced by correspondents. Most of the obstacles can be attributed to cultural differences, including language barriers, suspicion and mistrust and unfamiliarity with local customs (417).

In his Foreign Correspondence Hohenberg writes about the role of the foreign correspondent:

> . . . it will be the role of the foreign correspondent to create understanding between peoples by bringing to them more meaningful news of each other. As such, he may very well be a decisive element. For it may fall to him in the future, as it has in the past, to represent the difference between war and peace (1964, 452).

Along similar lines, Maxwell surveyed 37 foreign correspondents and presented findings in the form of essays on each foreign correspondent. Among topics discussed were language, censorship, availability of sources and, occasionally, explicit references to culture, such as the following by Reuters correspondent Marshall F. Bannel:

> I suppose the basic problem encountered by a correspondent outside of the United States in presenting a clear picture of significant happening in one or more foreign countries is the fact that he knows that the average American reader has no conception of the difference in thinking, customs, reactions and mentality in general about which he is writing.
>
> And while there are of course many other factors involved, it complicates the proper presentation of many very significant stories because the correspondent knows that the story or news item will be judged and considered by American thinking and standards (1954, 34).

In observance of the 100th anniversary of the Foreign Press Association, Goldsmith compiled a number of short essays (Britain in the Eye of the World, 1988) by FPA members. Several addressed the

issue of culture. Among them was an essay titled "A Bridge of Bridges" by Cheng Kexiong:

> Does not my job as a journalist call for being a human bridge, to enable the traffic of thought and ideas to cross barriers and circulate both ways? But it is not an easy task to be a bridge between different races, societies and cultures, to carry the traffic of mutual understanding. One has to learn so much before one can undertake such a task (1988, 74).

Many of the works examined were autobiographical. Most, of course, dealt with specific events in the lives of the authors. A few offered pertinent observations on culture. Geyer's Buying the Night Flight (1983) is an outstanding example. She is candid about her own development: "Although I was now an experienced reporter at home, I did not know--and there was nobody to tell me--how to work in a foreign country. So instead of psyching it out and adapting to my new culture, I tried to work as I always had. And it was a mistake" (1983, 48-49). She points to the danger of ethnocentrism:

> We cannot judge others by ourselves--that is the ultimate and the unforgivable egocentricity. We must go further than just good reporting, we must somehow incorporate into our writing an implicit understanding of the different truths that other cultures are living by--and dying by (156).

A critical and personal view of the work of the foreign corespondent is Harriman's Hack: Home Truths About Foreign News (1987). In the following excerpt he addresses the issue of the foreign correspondent's attitude and perspective in interpreting news for their editors and readers:

> Journalists are sent off to all sorts of catastrophes and political feuds overseas and told to file tight, comprehensible copy, and quickly. Those who don't, don't go overseas next time. To function like this, journalists have to have fairly durable, well-stocked kit bags, not just with a few clean shirts or blouses, but of attitudes and recognisable (sic) perspectives as well. Whatever and however razor-sharp their guile and wits may be, in the end what's going to be printed has to make sense in terms editors believe their readers will understand (1987, 192).

Hughes' Foreign Devil: Thirty Years of Reporting from the Far East (1972) is another example of an autobiography that addresses the foreign press corps and their problems adapting to cultural difference.

> Whatever the drawbacks and the frustrations and the language barrier and the involuntary restraint in writing to try to preserve a dateline, no one--however informed, intuitive or divinely inspired--can report properly about a country which he has never entered, even in solitary confinement, or a people whom he has not seen at home, even from solitary confinement (1972, 156).

Perhaps the most thoughtful work probing cultural dimensions of foreign reporting is Rosenblum's Coups and Earthquakes (1981). He deals extensively with cultural issues. He offers a careful examination of the reporting system itself, explores the role of the correspondent and offers suggestions for improving international journalism. Rosenblum underscores the importance of cultural context in international communication:

> With local events, an American is aware of what is new and important because he is nearby; he can add his own context. He has aunts in San Diego and he travels each summer to New York, so he at least has a frame of reference for evaluating national news. Within the United States, heavy competition among news organizations and conversations with friends provide an automatic system of checks against incomplete and inaccurate domestic reporting. But when cultural barriers are crossed, and reporting is from faraway places which stir no familiar responses, any piece of information is new--and possibly news (1981, 7).

Rosenblum discusses specific cultural factors, such as bias, as crucial to the process of interpreting news about other cultures. In writing about other societies, foreign correspondents, he argues, must be aware of the difficulties of overcoming cultural favoritism and cultural bias.

> The question of bias is particularly important, since readers and viewers tend to add their own distortions. Few people back home can accept the idea that anyone killing their sons and husbands is just one of the combatants in a multi-sided war. Logically, a person's attitude toward Jews, Arabs, black Africans or Cubans will affect how he interprets wars involving them. From far away, it is difficult to

> understand causes of hostilities and details of conflicts, even when they are reported with pristine objectivity. If elements of bias are added, serious misunderstanding is inevitable (173).

With the caveat that any conclusions based on this glimpse into a portion of the literature dealing with foreign correspondents must be regarded as tentative, we venture two observations: (1) Since most of the books examined do not deal with culture explicitly, questions might be raised about how important culture is regarded by foreign correspondents and whether they are conscious of the role it plays in their work; and (2) At the same time, some foreign correspondents are sensitive to the role culture plays in the journalistic enterprise and try to take such factors into account in their reporting and--perhaps more precisely, interpretations--of events in other lands.

Interviews with Foreign Correspondents

The object of our interviews was to get foreign correspondents to talk about how they go about their work, their preparation to become foreign correspondents and, in particular, how they felt culture figured in their work. We typically asked about personal background, education and early experience and encouraged them to discuss their work as foreign correspondents. We also asked them about such issues as cultural bias, stereotyping, journalistic constraints and, in general, challenges of reporting from another society. We specifically probed each about the notion of intercultural journalism.

We taped each interview and later transcribed each tape. Five interviews took place at the University of Iowa and one in the office of The Guardian, London. We chose subjects primarily on the basis of availability but also sought a diversity of gender, media and locale. A list of respondents with brief information about each appears in Appendix B.

Most of our respondents expressed awareness of the role of culture in their work. But the awareness tended to operate at an unconscious or intuitive level. In our interviews, we tried to stimulate reflection on cultural issues. An examination of the transcripts of interviews suggested responses could be organized around four headings. We refer to these as cultural frames, and we do not regard them as mutually exclusive: (1) cultural background, (2) cultural sensitivity, (3) cultural awareness and (4) cultural constraints. By examining these factors in light of cultural factors, we hope to gain insight into the cultural framing process of foreign correspondents.

Cultural background: Prior background, including education and professional experience, formed initial focal discussion points during interviews. Other topics also emerged. These included curiosity as a prime attribute for the correspondent and the extent of reporter involvement in news events.

Five of the foreign correspondents were journalists by trade with extensive experience in print journalism. There was one exception, an agricultural specialist who became involved in the ecumenical press service of the World Council of Churches. Several correspondents, besides their domestic journalistic experience, had the opportunity to participate in special educational programs prior to becoming foreign correspondents. Two had been Nieman fellows, and another held a master's degree in Soviet studies from Harvard.

Preparation, to some extent, is unique to every situation and society. As a correspondent in the then-Soviet Union, one correspondent had studied the language, history and literature of the region, but later, when stationed in Japan, the correspondent felt she had only minimal cultural preparation. Reading about the region helped, but the correspondent was not able to learn Japanese because of

time constraints. To remedy this, she hired assistants who became her cultural guides.

Prior experiences as a foreign correspondent, of course, can be helpful. One correspondent explained conflicts and societal differences to his readers in terms of past experience. As he was stationed in new regions, the correspondent was able to analyze events by relating them to his knowledge of other places he had been. He was sensitive to stereotyping. He commented that Americans have a habit of seeing people in collective images: "Brown skinned people--they're all the same; yellow-skinned people--they're all the same. Well, I don't accept that from day one. And the more experience I've had, the more I'm sensitive to this."

Prior assumptions are another potential hazard which must be guarded against. "There are certain things you sort of take for granted that are unique to the first places you encounter them," one correspondent said. In the Soviet Union, she noticed private plots of land outside the city that citizens used for small-scale farming. She assumed this practice originated with the Russians. Later in Germany she discovered the practice originated in nineteenth century Berlin. Lack of knowledge or inaccurate information can result in distortion and misunderstanding. Such knowledge is particularly vital in the challenge of offering an informed and valid understanding of another society.

Cultural experience for another correspondent involved subtle aspects of communication, such as cultural mannerisms. "You have to get used to what the unwritten rules are," she said. Covering both Japan and Korea at the same time, she often had trouble adapting from the Japanese culture of indirectness to the Korean culture of specificity. "If you use the wrong culture, you get the wrong

answers," she said. She pointed out that her experience in Japan aided her in asking certain questions in Moscow that she never would have asked had she not been to Japan. One example involved Japan's dramatic economic success. The Russians, she said, were unimpressed at the time. But now the view toward Japan has changed.

Lack of cultural preparation was a common theme among the correspondents. It made them uncomfortable. Extensive reading can help. "I don't think you're ever prepared for your work," confessed one correspondent. "There's always so much more that you wished you had under your belt in order to assess a situation and understand it. (Reading) makes a difference as to your expectations, for example, how people react to things." Undoubtedly, she said, the best prepared correspondents are those who speak the languages, are informed about the countries they are reporting about and have some cultural frame of reference.

Although correspondents cannot prepare themselves completely for assignments, they should never go to a new society without having a basic knowledge of the region, another correspondent said. He suggested that foreign correspondents take every opportunity to read and talk to other people to establish a background. He underscored the importance of reading, which, he said, can help a person gain valuable information and understanding. Particular attention, he said, should be paid to nationality: how you define people is the core of all relationships.

Background reading is important, repeated another correspondent, who quickly added that being curious is even more important. Other respondents underscored the need for the foreign correspondent to be curious. They associated curiosity with a desire to understand. Said one: "(You) really want to understand the fundamentals of whatever it

is (you're writing about)--the situation that you are looking at--(and) that you are not just going to be content taking a surface look."

Another correspondent warned against the "curious tourist" style of journalism. "You shouldn't come to Manila and all of a sudden say, how come all these people are named 'Fernandez.' How come all these people play guitars? And how come all these priests are around the streets? You shouldn't come in that way. Now maybe a tourist will. A tourist will want to find the best hotel and the best restaurant and then sort of learns from there. But the journalist should be chapters ahead of that by the time he approaches that story." Even then, he said, the journalist still has to sort out the endless information that is obtained.

Correspondents get paid to be nosy and curious, offered one correspondent. "There's always a certain feeling which I guess is more in a foreign country than in the U.S., sometimes a certain guilty feeling that you're sort of a voyeur, that you aren't really a participant in the country and sometimes this is good." The difficult part of not being involved as a participant in society is a feeling of a lessened responsibility toward readers. Correspondents usually have only a small readership in the country they report about and, thus, get less and perhaps skewed feedback. Correspondents must be aware of such problems and try to make appropriate corrections.

Another correspondent believed strongly that correspondents should live with the people they write about. But he pointed to several qualifications. "I think there's a fine line between being a journalist and being a documentarian, sort of an academic. I would say don't be a documenter of the culture you're living in. Live in the culture, but don't try to document it." Having a writer's curiosity is one aspect to keep in mind, and this involves putting the news and

information into reasonable terms rather than "scientific terms." Listening to people with a sharp attentiveness is one answer to this problem. In addition, he said, the correspondent should become a good responder. This involves mutual interaction by saying the right things at the right time or asking certain questions in the appropriate situations.

Personal involvement was of particular concern for one of the correspondents interviewed. In South Vietnam he exposed the former Saigon government's use of tiger cages to confine and punish dissidents. At the time he was teaching at a college and was the only teacher willing to help the students. He subsequently revealed that the U.S. was helping build new cages. Because of this and related events, he felt that a lot of what was happening in Vietnam wasn't getting out to the public. Thus, much of what he reported "came out of an involvement with people," as he said. Such participation could be considered a violation of journalistic norms. "I was violating one of the primary rules of reporting. And that is that you don't become a participant in stories that you're writing." The problem with this view, he said, is that journalists fit into an overall power structure and, as a result, are almost always confined to reporting what is sanctioned by the power structure. His approach, he said, enabled him to reveal truths that were not being reported, and to do so sometimes meant getting directly involved in the story.

Cultural sensitivity: Correspondents discussed a variety of issues associated with lack of cultural sensitivity, including stereotyping and selection of news items. Sensitivity in this sense refers to familiarity with the historical and cultural context of another society and implies not only awareness but also respect, if not empathy, for other ways of life.

One correspondent asserted that sensitivity and journalism ought to go hand in hand but said that many journalists are culturally insensitive. Some journalists who go overseas do not know the language and do not recognize the different customs and traditions cherished by other cultures.

Insensitivity is part of a large social problem in which people do not look beyond borders, the correspondent went on. "People hardly look beyond their state borders much less the national borders and realize that this is not the only way people live in the world. And I think that in order to have a greater sensitivity of what's going on around you and what's going on in the world is to be a generalist. . . You have to be a universalist." He suggested that the specialization of journalists into sports, business and political writing may be one reason for insensitivity toward other societies. "I think the tendency to move away from being a world generalist and being in tune with what's going on everywhere . . . moving away from this allows people to be less culturally sensitive because you can specialize."

Another correspondent noted that it was extremely important to be culturally sensitive. Otherwise the reporting can be faulty. "First of all you have to be sensitive to the person you are interviewing," said one correspondent. "And also you have to be sensitive enough to know, to assess whether he's telling you the truth or not." She said her main priority during the first 10 years she lived in Mexico was to try to understand the culture and people, to "understand how the system worked." One of her first steps was to learn Spanish. "It's very important because if you misunderstand the language, then you get your story wrong and you get your facts wrong. And so language is important. You have to . . . make sure that you've got it clear, that you've understood perfectly what it's about." Now she feels she has a

basic understanding of the culture because she catches herself doing the same things that local people do.

The same correspondent noted that her news organization strives to avoid offensive language. Arguments often arose over the use of the phrase "illegal aliens." Latin Americans did not regard such people as "illegal." Thus, if at all possible, she would use the term "undocumented migrants" to provide a less pejorative label.

Another correspondent was obliged to make a judgement on war reporting. During the Vietnam war, she felt it was more significant to write about villages than to write about military operations and U.S. involvement. In such a war situation, she felt there were several aspects to cover besides the fighting. "It's understandable (to cover the fighting), but I don't think it gave an understanding of what was going on in Vietnam. The kinds of stories that I would like to look for would be oral significance of what was happening. Those stories were hard to find, and no one knew what the significance was. Vietnam went on for four years, and the emphasis was on the American involvement."

Another correspondent primarily concerned with the press coverage of Vietnam said, "Just as we never had U.S. government officials that really understood the culture or really cared about the culture, we had very few journalists that did either." The problem, he said, rose with a general lack of cultural knowledge and the problem of not knowing Vietnamese. An additional problem was dependence upon U.S. officials for reports. "It was always in this U.S. kind of perspective," he said.

An added dimension for this correspondent in Vietnam was that he was expelled from the country because he wrote about the U.S.'s involvement in building new tiger cages for political prisoners. "The difference, of course, was that the first case (of using tiger cages)

showed the Vietnamese mistreating Vietnamese. The second case (in which the U.S. was found to be paying and providing for tiger cages) showed Americans mistreating Vietnamese. The first fits into American conceptions of American racist conceptions." It was more difficult for the public to accept the U.S.'s part in building the tiger cages because respected Americans were implicated and the notion challenged the public's own frame of reference.

Another correspondent said the journals he kept of his experience in the Peace Corps in Africa were a profitable means of producing culturally-oriented story ideas. He called the diary "living in another sort of cultural context." He became more aware that certain stereotypes are not always representative of a region's population. One of his influences was a former professor who believed that "as a journalist or as a documentarian, you just do not go into people's lives and try to capture them on film or capture them with a pen and pop out again in a matter of hours or even if it's days. It doesn't serve them justice or it doesn't really tell their story." Living in one country, Togo, for example, helped him better understand the ways of life and value systems of the people he wrote about.

Cultural awareness: Are correspondents consciously aware of the role culture plays in their work? If so, what is their concept of culture? Correspondents believed culture figured prominently in their work, though usually unconsciously, and felt intercultural journalism was a viable concept. Further, all had their own means of accounting for culture in their work.

One correspondent noted that his approach to writing about the culture of West Africa was different from typical foreign affairs reporting because nothing very newsworthy happens that would interest the media except such events as a famine, disaster or coup d'etat. In

looking for story possibilities, the correspondent admitted that journalists are "obliged to look for stories off the beaten path and are not typical news items." At the same time, he had to make sure that reader stereotypes were not perpetuated. Correspondents, he said, have to draw on their own experiences "knowing that these stereotypes for the most part may be representative for a certain percentage of the population in Africa but certainly not general for the entire African population."

He said he "tried to pick topical subjects, and things that had cultural relevance both to the Africans and the Europeans." Asked about intercultural journalism, he said he had never encountered the term but thought it addressed an important issue since many correspondents are culturally insensitive. Journalism and cultural sensitivity must to go hand in hand, he said. He cited an example of a National Geographic photographer taking pictures of Muslims in Mauritania without asking permission, explaining that it was equivalent to "their souls stolen into a camera."

The correspondent said he hoped all journalists would adopt a similar approach to writing about different cultures whether or not they were working in another country. He said that intercultural journalism was not exclusive to one country or one culture but is becoming an international model of journalism. Involved in this is an ability to read the local press of countries where the correspondent is stationed. "People like me who cross these lines try to write about all these societies and try to find what commonalities there are, in other words, try to explain the differences." He explained that when he was stationed in Russia he became upset at the notion that "they're just like us." In many obvious ways the people from different societies are similar, but political circumstances and world views

surrounding the individuals may be completely different. "Well, okay, how do we explain those differences? Well, that in a way is intercultural journalism--how to bridge the gap of a lack of understanding."

Another correspondent said she was not consciously aware of practicing intercultural journalism. Knowing the society well is the first step, she said, although this is not always possible. "Parachute journalism" does not allow a journalist to place events in a cultural perspective. Reporters who dart into and out of a country to cover an event at least ought to have good contacts from different parts of society. "You have to be flexible enough to mix with all these different people. They're obviously not the same as you, but you have to be flexible, (be able) to adapt. You have to talk to people from all spectrums and all colors," she said. She added that this is not easy because value clashes may be more apt to occur between different societies. In generating story ideas, she tried to focus on human interest, rather than disasters. She said she had become disenchanted with the mainstream press and its portrayal of the poorer countries.

Another correspondent, who also works as a foreign affairs section editor, was especially concerned with coverage of the third world. She said she was not conscious of cultural reporting but that her aim was to get reporters to give a more in-depth picture of the third world. "Our idea was that the sort of normal coverage of third world countries on news pages was very inadequate for obvious reasons--constraints, etc.," she said. "So by having this special space that we would kind of plan ahead, we would have a lot of time to work with people's copy. And also, I was trying to get foreign journalists like ourselves who wrote on it to try to do it in a different sort of way--not simply going for the most, kind of, if you like, news story but really try to

analyze and give a different picture--maybe an in-depth picture." She believed it was important for a reporter to have humility--to be able to listen to people without having a pre-set agenda or to be guided by predispositions. Another important point: Allow people to speak on their terms. "You therefore come up with something much more interesting and not so much imprisoned in your own kind of cultural bias, which we all have, coming from wherever it is we are coming from."

To avoid superficiality requires time. "I really expect the people who write for me to have a wider group of sources--and it's very time-consuming--sources in third world countries who are actually either in government or operating at a grassroots level," she said. "Finding those people and getting them to talk is a much more time-consuming business. It's not the kind of thing you can do when you are up against a deadline when you're doing a daily news story."

Several correspondents criticized journalism education for neglecting to include in the curriculum courses that deal with cultural sensitivity. Most of the correspondents agreed that there should be a better method of training journalists. One correspondent said it should begin at the college level with courses that deal with cultural sensitivity.

The importance of training was elaborated upon by another respondent: "Journalists have this incredible responsibility, really, of trying to get a world picture--which is the bit of the world they happen to be reporting--to their own society, particularly as important a society as the United States. But it's a struggle to educate people and to fight against this tendency to become more and more provincial the way television news has become in the States--it's got very, very little foreign coverage and it is very, very superficial." The more

prepared foreign correspondents are in the future, the more educated readers will also become.

Cultural constraints: To practice intercultural journalism successfully, a foreign correspondent must overcome many obstacles. One respondent summarized the sentiments of several correspondents when she said, "Cultural (or) personal reporting, if it's done right, is one of the most difficult things. It can also be done very easily if it's done badly." Among specific constraints mentioned were cultural bias, objectivity, fairness and depth.

The notion of objectivity in intercultural affairs reporting made one correspondent uncomfortable. "It's a lot better to accept the kind of cultural and intellectual constraints that you come into any situation from, and try to be as fair as you can," she said. "I think that's (the word, fair) a better word than objective because objective makes it sound as though you have a sort of magic neutrality which you know nobody does in any situation." She noted that all journalists are products of their education and environment and argued for more resources dedicated to in-depth coverage of events in the third world.

Another respondent also preferred fairness to objectivity. "What I would strive for in my writing is not objectivity, but fairness. I would like to present all of the points of view that I encounter in a way that really reflects what they think. And I think that's a little different. I think there's a kind of fake objectivity that doesn't really advance understanding," she said.

Another constraint cited by one correspondent was the difficulty of providing relevant and necessary information within space limitations. "We have to explain other values and other facts of life in the context of a story. But if we don't do it, then that story is not sufficient, is not enough." Background information is necessary

for audiences to gain a context for understanding. "Every story has a bit of history to it, and some of that has to be put across so as to put a bit of depth into the story."

One correspondent indicated that she works on the assumption that the newest reader knows nothing about her subject. Thus, she must bring a context to every story, a practice endorsed by her news organization. ". . . when you're a foreign correspondent," she went on, "you can pretty well assume that your public doesn't know much about the country and so if you talk about a political party you have to describe it, and all of this takes up words and takes up space."

A correspondent can deal with the intercultural angle only by being flexible and meeting a variety of people. One correspondent mentioned the difference between press conferences set up by the foreign correspondence association as opposed to those arranged by the national press. "The questions are different, and the way the people will answer is also different. That's one thing about being a foreign correspondent. It is very different than if you are writing for a newspaper in your own country where a lot of things are taken for granted."

Intercultural stories are more difficult to write and take considerably longer than a political or economic story, said one correspondent. She said that often she had to "start from scratch" in cultural stories because of the numerous aspects of the story which she doesn't initially understand. "With a cultural story, you have to be very, very familiar with what you are dealing with or you're going to take the wrong signals or give the wrong signals in the way you write something. The most important thing in trying to overcome cultural bias, in trying to understand whatever it is you're covering, is listening. And that is to listen not only to the words you're hearing

but the overtones." She added that to counteract cultural bias a reporter must constantly examine assumptions, including and especially those that correspondents may not realize they have. In this regard, she noted that a local assistant can be helpful.

Other obstacles to intercultural reporting come from local pressures as well as the attitude of the news organization itself, said one correspondent. "You have a lot of pressures from individuals who have their own preconceptions and also often from the government where you are operating. So you've got to learn to be quite sophisticated, to pick up and watch what you can do within the bounds of whatever political system that pertains to the particular place that you're in." As for the media, she said the main constraint is the failure to commit the necessary resources for foreign affairs coverage.

The two main constraints cited by another respondent were language and the media. "Language for me is being able to function in another culture," he said. He related this to being able to speak the cultural languages of New York as compared to that of the deep South, and the ability to adapt to the new environment. Unfortunately, he said, foreign news does not interest the media as a whole. In selecting topics, he said he tried to pick subjects that had cultural relevance both for local and international audiences.

One correspondent stated flatly what perhaps others fear, namely, that it would be difficult if not impossible to make a commercial success out of interculturally sensitive journalism. Thus, the burden of foreign affairs reporting rests with a few elite news organizations.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

With the notion of cultural framing as a theoretical backdrop, this study examined the role of culture in the work of the foreign correspondent by reviewing literature by and about foreign

correspondents and by interviewing a number of foreign correspondents. In gathering information, particular attention was give to culture. The aim was to explore cultural aspects of international news reporting. This could suggest avenues for more systematic inquiry into the role of culture in the work of foreign correspondents and lead to improved methods of professional preparation. The study itself is a report of an ongoing project.

Of the 75 books examined by and about foreign correspondents, fewer than half (44%) referred explicitly to culture. Most references were cursory. Exceptions were those works whose aim was to critically examine the role of the foreign correspondent.

Our in-depth interviews were designed to get foreign correspondents talking about how they go about their work, their preparation to become foreign correspondents and, in particular, how they felt culture figured in their work. The respondents generally expressed an unconscious awareness of the role of culture in their work. Interviews yielded information which we grouped into four cultural frames: cultural background, cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and cultural constraints.

Individual backgrounds set the stage for our analysis of cultural framing. Education provided a base for correspondents' knowledge and framing of perceptions. In cases where the correspondent was less prepared, such as in language, local assistants lent a hand in the cultural framing. Prior experience allowed correspondents to build upon their backgrounds and make comparisons across cultures. All the correspondents discussed curiosity as an important and positive characteristic of their work. There was a sense of wanting to know more about the culture. After collecting details, the challenge for the correspondent then was to sort and organize the information for

their audiences. Trying to explain differences through comparisons and bridging gaps of misunderstanding played a role in cultural framing. Personal involvement could be advantageous in understanding a culture, but most correspondents agreed that it was best to remain detached from news events.

Cultural sensitivity was seen as an important factor in cultural framing. Without a sensitive eye searching for cultural context, stories can result that convey invalid information or misguided meanings. Without an understanding of events, interpretations can be erroneous, possibly enforcing stereotypes and ethnocentrism. War reporting generally does not lend itself to providing the significance of situations, while cultural reporting is more likely to provide a more accurate frame.

Cultural awareness was deemed essential in determining exactly how correspondents saw culture in their work. Yet most correspondents were not aware of the role of culture until the topic was introduced during the interviews. Upon reflecting on the concept of culture, correspondents then readily addressed such culturally-imbued topics as the need to bridge gaps, the need to know a society and the need to provide understanding. They may not have realized that they were operating from certain cognitive frames of mind. Or, as Hackett has expressed it, they may have had an "unconscious absorption of assumptions about the social world in which the news must be embedded in order to be intelligible to its intended audience" (1985, 263). But they were aware that readers relied on their information and they felt it was important to communicate accurate information. Cultural education and adapting to a society were several ways mentioned by correspondents that allowed culture to penetrate one's cultural frame.

Not providing a context for understanding was seen as perhaps the main constraint to cultural affairs reporting. The reasons for this included lack of time and space, cultural bias on the part of the journalist, language and lack of media interest.

In terms of education, it is clear that more attention should be given to the role of culture in reporting (Bramlett-Solomon 1989). This involves not only cultural perceptions but also more appropriate journalistic methodologies. Since information gathering methods can significantly influence the nature of results obtained, it is incumbent upon journalists striving for a clear understanding of events in another culture to utilize methods that are sensitive to local conditions. To some extent at least, these attempts should portray other cultures on their own terms rather than merely through the cultural filters of the journalist. This may mean employing unobtrusive news gathering techniques, not unlike methods employed by anthropologists (Pauly et al. 1981; Bird 1987; Grindal and Rhodes 1987). As Fisher has noted:

> . . . international news coverage and reporting requires a skill basically different from that needed for domestic reporting. . . in international news coverage and reporting, the context and meaning have to be transmitted in addition, along with the description of the event itself, if news is to accurately inform. This is a vastly more difficult task. . . (1988, 120)

Background, education, understanding, fairness, depth, sensitivity--all these elements, and perhaps more, figure in cultural framing. As the world continues to implode, it is incumbent that we try to understand better than we do now what happens in the cultural framing process and suggest ways that those who interpret other cultures for us may do so with greater care and concern. This project, as it continues with its probing of other facets of the issue, may

provide further clues in our understanding of cultural framing from a journalistic perspective.

Questions dealing with unconscious assumptions and everyday practices need to be examined in greater detail than was possible in this study or than has been reported elsewhere (e.g., Said 1981, Parenti 1986). Particular attention ought to be focussed on the foreign correspondents' reliance on professional technique rather than a genuine understanding of and knowledge about the subjects being reported upon.

Intercultural affairs journalism has always been with us. It is what foreign correspondents do. Only now are we beginning to understand what it means and how it differs from other kinds of journalism.

APPENDIX A

BOOKS BY AND ABOUT FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

--Victoria Brittain interviewed Feb. 23, 1989, in London. Began as a correspondent in Vietnam, traveled to Algiers and Nairobi for The Guardian, London, for six years, eventually writing for the Third World Review from Africa. Is an editor at The Guardian and author of several books, including Children of Resistance: Statements from the Harare Conference on Children's Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa (1988), The Gulf Between Us: the Gulf War and Beyond (1988) and Hidden Lives, Hidden Deaths: South Africa's Crippling of a Continent (1988).

--Jacki Buswell interviewed Oct. 8, 1991, in Iowa City. With the English language news agency Notimex in Mexico. Has written for the Daily Telegraph and Voices of Mexico. Has worked on feminist issues in her native Australia, as well as in England and Mexico.

--Don Luce interviewed Nov. 10, 1988, in Iowa City. Has written for the ecumenical press service of the World Council of Churches. Author of several books taken from his experience in Vietnam, including Hostages of War: Saigon's Political Prisoners (1973) and Vietnam: The Unheard Voices (1969).

--Elizabeth Pond interviewed April 25,1991, in Iowa City. Formerly with the Christian Science Monitor. Has reported from the Soviet Union, Korea, Cambodia, Japan and Germany, among other locales. Author of several books, including After the Wall: American Policy Toward Germany (1990) and From the Yaroslavsky Station: Russia Perceived (1981).

--Murray Seeger interviewed March 5, 1990, in Iowa City. Former correspondent with Newsweek, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Los Angeles Times and Time. Has covered the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Germany and reported from Singapore, Japan, India and Indonesia.

--Marco Werman interviewed Nov. 9, 1989, in Iowa City. Has worked with the BBC. Served with the Peace Corps in Togo, Africa, and has been freelancing from that region for a number of years.

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